CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND FIFTEENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 18 February 1999, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Rodríguez Cedeño (Venezuela)

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The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I wish to declare open the 815th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

It is a great honour for me and for Venezuela to take the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament, especially in these initial stages, which are always difficult, when we have before us the challenge of adopting the decisions required to make progress and begin substantive consideration of the items on our agenda. I am certain that the political will and flexibility will enable us to build the necessary consensus to adopt our programme of work as soon as possible, on which, I am equally certain, we have been able to identify important common elements in these first days.

First of all, I am pleased to express my deepest gratitude to my predecessor, Ambassador Robert Grey of the United States, for the effort he made during the first stage of our work, during which we succeeded in adopting our agenda and began to consider the item relating to the programme of work. I should now like on behalf of us all to welcome the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Mrs. Aaslang Haga, who will be our first speaker this morning.

As you know, Ambassador Campbell of Australia will soon complete his duties as the representative of his country to the Conference, as he has been called by his Government to discharge other official duties. Ambassador Campbell did an excellent job as Special Coordinator on the subject of anti-personnel mines, facilitating consensus on ways and means to address the item, within this Conference. On behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, I would like to wish Ambassador Campbell the greatest success in his tasks and the greatest well-being and happiness in his personal life.

In addition to the honourable representative of Norway I have on my list of speakers the distinguished representatives of New Zealand, Brazil, the Republic of Korea, Ukraine, Cuba, who will address the Conference on behalf of the Group of 21, and Chile. I should now like to call on the honourable State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Mrs. Aaslang Haga.

Mrs. HAGA (Norway): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Ambassador Rodríguez Cedeño, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We look forward to cooperating with you in our efforts to make substantive progress on disarmament issues in 1999. I hope we all will work to facilitate the smooth operation of this body by building on the agreements and compromises that were reached through so much hard work last year.

The last time I addressed the Conference I concluded my statement by saying that we would like to see work started immediately on the reform questions. That was a year ago. Not much has happened since then. Not even a modest expansion by five countries has been possible. This is very disappointing.

The most pressing reform issue continues to be the enlargement of the membership of the CD. As it has been repeated over and over again, the

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reputation, relevance, political legitimacy and, ultimately, the future of this Conference is closely linked to its membership. Treaties within the framework of the CD are negotiated with a view to universal application and adherence. It follows that the negotiations must be open to universal participation. And no less important, there is nothing to justify that we, the current members of the CD, should exclude other countries that are equally committed to disarmament and peaceful international relations from membership. I deeply regret that the Conference has not been able to admit Ecuador, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia as members. It is all the more difficult to understand and accept that this decision is being upheld as nobody seems willing to explain what their objections really are.

We would warmly welcome a decision to accept these five countries as new members. This would, however, only be a first and very limited step. The Conference must continue on its way towards universal membership and become open to any country wishing to be a member.

For too long the performance of the Conference has demonstrated that the current working methods of the CD are in urgent need of reform. We recognize, of course, that procedural problems or disputes normally stem from political differences. But if the present situation is allowed to continue, the credibility and standing of the Conference will be further undermined.

We would therefore strongly advise that the excellent and impressive work carried out by the reform Special Coordinators, Ambassadors Hofer, Illanes and Náray, be resumed as soon as possible.

I would now like to set forth our position on some of the major multilateral arms control and disarmament issues.

Like other parties to the NPT, Norway is deeply committed to nuclear disarmament. Our ultimate goal continues to be the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The nuclear-weapon States have a particular responsibility for reducing the political value attached to nuclear weapons and thereby the role of these weapons in international politics. They must continue to have this responsibility.

We welcome all practical initiatives and measures that can help to enhance transparency in the nuclear field, that involve new reductions in existing nuclear arsenals, and that help to further lower the existing alert level of strategic forces.

Nuclear issues are a concern to all countries. The international community has a legitimate interest in being kept informed about the progress achieved as well as any difficulties and challenges encountered in the nuclear disarmament process. The CD should not, in our view, be mandated to negotiate nuclear weapons reductions. This does not mean that we see no role for the CD in questions related to nuclear disarmament. By establishing a procedure for reporting on nuclear issues and policies, the CD could serve an an important forum for discussion and exchange of information. This would give the nuclear-weapon States an opportunity to supply information both on the results

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achieved through unilateral and bilateral initiatives and on their nuclear policies, thus demonstrating their commitment to nuclear disarmament. Increased transparency on nuclear issues would enhance confidence and reduce distrust.

This is why Norway, together with Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, has submitted a proposal that the CD should establish an ad hoc working group to study ways and means of establishing an exchange of information and views on efforts towards nuclear disarmament. We believe this is a constructive proposal. We hope it could result in an agreement on how the CD could address issues related to nuclear disarmament in a satisfactory way. The proposal solely addresses procedures for dealing with questions concerning nuclear disarmament, and does not presuppose any particular result. It is based on an assessment of what this forum can realistically be expected to agree on. In our view, the proposal offers a flexible approach which will safeguard the interests of all parties.

Further progress in nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation is also dependent on our willingness to address the issue of fissile material for weapons purposes. Limiting access to such material is the key to preventing horizontal and vertical proliferation. None of the arms control or arms reduction treaties that have been negotiated so far include particular provisions on fissile material. The time is ripe to make such material subject to strict regulation and control

Norway was encouraged by the decision last year to establish the Ad Hoc Committee to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. We are equally disappointed that the CD has not yet been able to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee. The time has now come for members of this body to move from endless consultations to a concrete decision on an early start of negotiations. From the very beginning of this process, we must demonstrate innovative flexibility so as not to exclude any pragmatic and practical solutions necessary to deal with fissile material in an adequate manner.

In our view the main focus of the negotiations should be on the production of fissile material. But at the same time we believe it is important to address the issue of past production and existing stockpiles in one way or another. The views expressed thus far regarding stockpiles do not always reflect the complexity of these issues. The current discussions on whether stockpiles are to be included in the negotiations will probably not lead us anywhere. We should rather give careful consideration to the question of whether certain categories of stockpile material are suitable for inclusion in a future treaty. It is important to consider the options that are available for States to address the stockpile issue in a multilateral framework.

We do not believe that the stockpile issue related to military inventories should be considered in treaty negotiations. On the other hand, we believe there would be merit in addressing fissile material that has been extracted from dismantled nuclear warheads and other military stocks that are

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now surplus to or in excess of military requirements. Fissile material that has been removed from the military production cycle and is redundant is steadily increasing. It represents an increased danger in terms of proliferation. This inventory should no longer have the status of military non-verifiable material. It should gradually be made subject to a transparent, non-military and civilian regime subject to international verification. It is important to recognize that this material cannot be transferred instantaneously from the military to the civilian sector, and that the steps involved in doing so will be complex, time-consuming and expensive. Serious consideration should be given to developing and establishing an international norm for States in dealing with stockpiles of surplus material. Such a norm, developed within the framework of the negotiations, should ensure the following: irreversibility - that is, that none of these stocks are returned or diverted to weapon programmes and that the material is rendered inaccessible to military use as soon as practicable; secondly, security - that is, that the stocks are made secure from theft and sabotage; thirdly, safety - that is, that the material does not harm human health or the environment; and fourthly, national control - that is, the development of an effective international standard for material accounting and self-auditing which will help to improve national control of such stocks.

Norway believes that the treaty provisions regarding production must include a credible verification regime that will provide the same degree of assurance with regard to compliance as other non-proliferation and arms control agreements. Considerations of principle and practical application suggest that IAEA safeguards and existing export control regimes should be used as a basis when drawing up the verification arrangements for this treaty.

When it comes to verification of excess military fissile material, we fully acknowledge the complexity of this issue. In this regard it may be necessary to develop a separate set of verification methods and procedures that will enhance international confidence that fissile material subject to control is not returned to nuclear-weapons programmes, while at the same time ensuring that the inspectors do not gain access to classified information. In this context, it may be of interest to look at the Trilateral Initiative by the United States, the Russian Federation and IAEA on fissile material that is no longer required for defence purposes, and the ongoing process of drafting a model verification agreement.

Let me briefly refer to a related issue which is important to my country. Highly enriched uranium that is produced for non-explosive purposes, and used as fuel for the propulsion of naval reactors, also involves a risk of proliferation and is cause for concern. We should consider addressing this issue in the negotiations with a view to improving safety and the control of such material. We should also consider devising arrangements to ensure that this material is in fact used for non-explosive purposes by confirming both the amount of the material intended for such use and the actual area of use. When confirming the amount of the material, this should be done without specific reference to its design and composition.

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We believe that issues not obviously part of the negotiations should nonetheless be addressed in an adequate way. These issues may best be dealt with within a separate framework designed to enhance transparency and build confidence in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Norway has on several occasions presented a four-step proposal for increased transparency and confidence-building measures for such material. The proposal emphasizes the importance of establishing voluntary measures that would increase transparency on holdings of plutonium and highly enriched uranium through reporting, inspection and safeguard procedures with a view to introducing agreed, monitored net reductions from these stockpiles. One could consider whether IAEA should play a role in facilitating a process to this end.

The "Joint statement of principles for management and disposition of plutonium" by the United States and the Russian Federation, agreed at the September summit meeting in Moscow, is a path-breaking initiative in this regard. It demonstrates what can be achieved through a voluntary process. We would like to see this initiative expanded to the multilateral level, enabling close cooperation with other countries that possess a nuclear capability.

We are delighted that the Convention banning anti-personnel landmines will enter into force as early as 1 March this year. The fact that more than 130 States have signed, and well over 60 have already ratified, is a testimony to the political force behind this Convention. The Convention is one of the more important diplomatic achievements in recent years. But millions of people are still suffering from the threat of anti-personnel landmines. Our efforts have only just begun. We have reached a new stage in the Ottawa Process where the emphasis is shifting from campaigning to implementation.

We are certainly very grateful to the Government of Mozambique for its offer to host the First Meeting of States Parties in Maputo in May. It is highly appropriate for the First Meeting of States Parties to take place in a mine-affected country, which also is a recognition of Africa's crucial role in bringing about a total ban on anti-personnel landmines. The forthcoming meeting in Maputo will be the first manifestation of the fact that the Convention has entered into force and the successful establishment of a framework for resolving the tremendous humanitarian problems caused by landmines. The meeting will provide an opportunity for States parties, interested non-States parties, humanitarian agencies and organizations to discuss in a constructive and forward-looking way initiatives and measures to effectively implement the objectives of the Mine Ban Convention. We appreciate the invitation from Mozambique to an informal consultative meeting here in Geneva on 1 March as part of the preparations for the First Meeting of States Parties. We hope that all interested parties will take this opportunity to contribute positively to a successful meeting in Maputo.

We must ensure the future sustainability of this very important process. We must continue to advocate the universalization of the Convention and to consolidate the norm it has established. At the same time we must make the

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best possible use of the human, financial and technical resources made available to implement the objectives of the Convention. We should aim to organize this work within the framework of the Convention, in a way which promotes continuity, openness, transparency and inclusiveness. An important element to this end would be to settle for a single venue for future annual meetings of States parties, review conferences and other meetings related to the Convention. We should also consider how to structure inter-sessional work so as to maintain the open-ended and cooperative spirit of the Ottawa Process. As a future venue and a focal point for the Mine Ban Convention and the various activities in the field of mine action that it will produce, Geneva would offer a wide variety of diplomatic and technical expertise, a broad representation of diplomatic missions and humanitarian agencies and relevant non-governmental organizations, including ICRC, WHO, UNHCR and the newly established Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

We are also looking forward to the first annual meeting of the States parties to the amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), which will take place later this year. Both the Mine Ban Convention and the amended Protocol II with its consultation mechanism ensure that the landmine issue will continue to be on the international disarmament agenda in the future.

We note that some countries have shown an interest in a separate, limited ban on transfers of anti-personnel landmines. We agree with those who have suggested that this issue can most appropriately be discussed in the context of the CCW.

In my statement to the CD last year, I highlighted the need for international action to combat the proliferation of small arms. I am certainly pleased to note that a number of important initiatives in this regard have been launched over the last year, and the issue is steadily rising higher on the international agenda.

The moratorium on the import, export and production of light weapons declared in November 1998 by all West African States is the most far-reaching programme to date. It is now up to the international community to contribute to the success of this initiative, both by respecting the moratorium and by contributing resources for its implementation. Norway has supported the development of this initiative for several years. We will co-host an information meeting on the West Africa Moratorium here in Geneva before summer.

Other important initiatives include the negotiation in Vienna of a firearms protocol under the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the ratification and implementation of the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, and the implementation of the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports.

It is clear that without technical and financial resources, many of the promising international initiatives now under way might fizzle out and become futile. In particular, this is true of the many regional, national and local

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projects in conflict-prone developing countries. Norway recently launched a UNDP Trust Fund for supporting efforts to prevent and reduce the proliferation of small arms. We encourage other countries to contribute to this fund. I am pleased to note that Switzerland has already supported the fund and a number of other countries are looking into the possibility of doing so.

The many initiatives and approaches available make it particularly important to try to develop a common understanding of the main concerns and issues to be addressed relating to small arms. We are already moving towards a more common understanding, but enhanced coherence, better coordination and more concerted action are still required. To cite resolution 53/77 B of the General Assembly, there is a "need to advance efforts towards wider cooperation and better coordination in the struggle against the accumulation, proliferation and widespread use of small arms through the [Oslo Common Understanding] ... and the Brussels Call for Action".

Our aim is to create a safer environment for those who suffer from the results of the uncontrolled proliferation of small arms. The various regional conflicts require different approaches and solutions, but we should generally seek to include the small arms aspect as part of conflict resolution. We must also find ways to strengthen preventive measures in order to halt the uncontrolled spread of small arms. The complexity of the small arms issue calls for a cautious approach where smaller steps may produce more practical results than too ambitious and perhaps more spectacular endeavours.

The issues of landmines and small arms demonstrate how important it is to address human security. This fact does not exclude the continued relevance of State security questions. Indeed, human security and State security are interrelated. To secure a safer world for all, we must comprehensively deal with the problems related to both weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the honourable State Secretary of Norway for her statement and the kind words she addressed to the Chair. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of New Zealand, Ambassador Pearson.

Mr. PEARSON (New Zealand): Mr. President, first let me congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you well in your endeavours to engage the CD in substantive work and you can count on New Zealand support and cooperation. I also wish to record our appreciation for the work of your predecessor, Ambassador Grey, to seek agreement on our programme of work. Ambassador Grey worked hard to breathe life into the CD and his effort in undertaking consultations is appreciated. May I welcome all our new colleagues to the Conference from Colombia, Argentina, Slovakia, Sweden, Israel, Indonesia and Venezuela? I should also like to bid farewell to two special colleagues - Ambassador Campbell and Ambassador Bourgois. We shall miss the perceptiveness, good sense and wit that they have brought to this Conference.

(Mr. Pearson, New Zealand)

Mr. President, as you search for consensus on our work this year, it is essential that nuclear issues are accorded the highest priority. This, at least, seems to be one objective on which we can all agree.

New Zealand continues to believe, along with the majority of others, that the Conference can, and must, address nuclear disarmament. We cannot continue to dismiss this imperative as being inappropriate or premature. Nor can we accept the view that addressing nuclear disarmament in this Conference might, in some way, defeat the purpose for which we are striving: the eventual elimination of these pernicious weapons.

We have heard the argument that the Conference is not the place to deal with nuclear disarmament at this time. We find that assertion extraordinary given that this body is the sole multilateral negotiating forum charged with addressing disarmament. It is not credible to repeatedly endorse the need for nuclear disarmament in United Nations resolutions and in other settings, and not to pursue the objective in the CD.

We have heard the assertion that establishing a formal mechanism on nuclear disarmament means attempting to multilaterilize the ongoing bilateral disarmament agenda. New Zealand does not advocate the multilateralization of the START process. And we have always made that clear. The bilateral START process is hugely significant and has our full and unequivocal support. But, we continue to believe that a mechanism - an appropriate subsidiary body - can and should be established in the Conference. This is no more and no less than our international obligations require. Moreover, the interests of non-nuclear-weapon States should not be excluded from contributing to the process of nuclear disarmament. As we have noted before in this chamber, nuclear weapons are multilateral in their reach and impact whether we like it or not. That gives us all the right to continue to call for their progressive elimination and the responsibility to work for that goal.

Our aim in the CD is not to design a negotiating straitjacket. Rather, we wish to see a mechanism where there can be serious debate and substantive deliberation on steps that might add value in the future, to the bilateral process already under way and the plurilateral dimension that will need to begin at an appropriate moment. Adding value would underpin the process, not undermine it.

Again, New Zealand made this call in last year's General Assembly as one of the co-sponsors of the "New agenda" resolution. And we shall continue to do so. It is a call that enjoys significant international support both inside and outside this Conference. It is a call on which the people we are here to represent expect us to demonstrate leadership.

In exploring whether consensus is possible on a mechanism, we should ensure a credible outcome. It should deliver more than the present "troika" arrangement has been capable of doing. The "troika" is a step in the right direction, and we welcome very much the efforts of all those Presidents who

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have pursued its mandate. But, this arrangement has tended to lack transparency, visibility and momentum. If we were to continue with it, then these shortcomings need to be rectified.

An arrangement confined only to reporting would be insufficient, in our view. It would be unfortunate, we believe, to relegate this body - which is mandated to negotiate - to a role where its members are passive recipients of briefings.

There are two proposals before us - from South Africa and Canada - which deserve very close attention. They do not seek to prejudge an outcome. Nor do they prescribe a negotiating mandate. They do not attempt to determine unrealistic time-frames. And they do not call for the multilateralization of ongoing bilateral and unilateral disarmament. They seek only to identify "if and when" future moves should be explored.

They offer both the ingredients and the prospect to move forward. Serious deliberation and debate on what might not be the way to proceed would not compromise any country's security interests. On the contrary, the greater degree of transparency such a process would deliver would enhance national security interests. That is what we mean in adding value. We should, therefore, ask ourselves where the real difficulty is. When our work in this Conference will always be driven by consensus, there is no threat of descending down an imaginary slippery slope.

Another immediate priority before us is to get down to work on a fissile materials treaty. It is unfortunate that we have yet to engage in negotiations for this treaty. It is even more extraordinary when, 186 countries agreed this was a priority in 1995 when the "Principles and objectives" of the NPT were adopted; when, there have been many resolutions, over a period of years, in the General Assembly which have called for work to begin without delay; when, the CD endorsed this imperative in its annual report; when, in August last year, we took the step of establishing an ad hoc committee; and, when, only last December, another such call was made in the General Assembly which enjoyed consensus.

Designing a fissile treaty that will have the capacity to address non-proliferation and disarmament will be no mean challenge. It will require some creative thinking and political flexibility. One of our tasks will be to ensure that the controls put in place will justify international confidence. Another challenge will be to deliver an instrument that is both non-discriminatory and multilateral in its reach. And, we shall need to agree on verification machinery that is creditable but cost-effective.

While we shall want to comment shortly in more detail on the possible shape of this treaty, we are realistic enough to appreciate that dealing with production and stocks may not be possible in a single instrument. One might have to follow the other. But, sooner or later, the international community will want to confront existing stocks of fissile material in seeking to create a permanent disarmament measure.

(Mr. Pearson, New Zealand)

New Zealand does not indulge in drawing linkages on our work programme. But, we do find it very odd that unfinished business in one year is not able to be taken up automatically in the following year. And, it makes our annual report appear meaningless.

In the real world, the imperatives of disarmament and arms control do not arrange themselves in tidy and convenient calendar packages. Neither should we attempt to do so.

For this reason, we can accept the rolling over of our 1998 programme of work as the basis for getting down to business this year. It may not satisfy everyone - and it contains issues which New Zealand does not regard as immediate priorities - but it did satisfactorily capture consensus.

If anything, the 1998 programme of work was probably overambitious given the limited time we have in any year for deliberation and negotiation. This year, if we are to engage in substantive negotiations on an issue which we regard collectively as a priority, we could perhaps focus on a smaller menu and concentrate our energy and resources to that end. The old adage of biting off more than one can chew may be apposite.

For New Zealand, work on a mine transfer ban, for example, is not a priority. We are a State party to the Ottawa Convention and universalization of that new norm is our objective. Should partial measures, such as a mine transfer ban, still be considered important, then we should explore whether it would be more appropriate to take this up in the context of the CCW.

We think also that one Special Coordinator to deal with all the reform issues might make more sense because it would allow us to look at these questions in the round. While we are at it, it might be timely to take a look at our group structures and the relevance these have in today's world.

Addressing the proliferation in small arms is becoming more urgent. There is an emerging consensus on the devastating effects that excessive and destabilizing accumulations of these weapons are having, and we welcome the new initiatives which are seeking to address this pressing problem.

The past year was significant, if not momentous, on almost all fronts. For those of us who set such a high store by non-proliferation and disarmament, the results were mixed. A significant body blow was dealt to the non-proliferation norms last year. And, we had a meagre outcome at the second NPT PrepCom in Geneva.

A way must be found to deal with the reciprocal obligations and demands of disarmament on the one hand, and on the other the imperatives of non-proliferation. One is not possible without the other.

The NPT is absolutely fundamental. And, it is essential and indispensable as ever. We could not accept, and will reject, any suggestion that it might need to be revisited. But, we must ensure also that the legitimate expectations of its members are not suppressed.

(Mr. Pearson, New Zealand)

Looking beyond this Conference, we are reminded that it has taken almost a quarter of a century after entry into force of the original Convention to design verification machinery on biological weapons. That is not a brilliant track record for non-proliferation. We need to lift our game in these Geneva negotiations and we seek their completion before the end of this year. New Zealand is committed to that goal.

Our aim in these negotiations must be to deter and prevent violations of the Convention and to ensure compliance. We shall need to take into account the legitimate concerns of industry. And, we must address all aspects of the negotiating mandate.

New Zealand appreciates that some States parties who submit themselves to the Convention's obligations in good faith may lack the scientific and technical means to uphold these obligations unaided.

Experience suggests that these problems come not always from a lack of political will, but from a lack of knowledge of what to do. The negotiations should recognize this.

Finally, Mr. President, we hope during your term that we can take a decision soon to expand our membership as recommended by the Special Coordinator, Ambassador Hofer. This is also unfinished business in what must be a process of universalization of the Conference. New Zealand will continue to press for this outcome.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of New Zealand for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I now wish to give the floor to the representative of Brazil, Ambassador Bahadian.

Mr. BAHADIAN (Brazil) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, first of all allow me to congratulate you, as the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Venezuela, a neighbouring country and a friend of Brazil, on taking up the post of President of the Conference. I am sure that with your tact and your diplomatic skill, as well as your knowledge of international law, our Conference will be able to commence its substantive work. You may always rest assured of the support and cooperation of the delegation of Brazil.

(continued in English)

Let me also express my appreciation for the efforts made by your predecessor, Ambassador Robert Grey of the United States of America, and pay tribute to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, as well as to his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and their staff for their efficiency in facilitating the work of this Conference.

As we continue to discuss our programme of work, my delegation wishes to share its views on some of the issues before the Conference. It seems that there is no dispute that we should build upon the agreements and compromises

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reached last year. We could not in fact do otherwise without risking moving backwards and losing the progress achieved. A long-awaited decision was taken in 1998 by this Conference - the start of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, which should constitute an effective and genuine measure of both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Brazil is encouraged in this regard by the fact that resolution 53/77 I of the United Nations General Assembly was approved by consensus, thus providing the necessary political support for the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on this matter.

Picking up where we left off in 1998 does not, however, preclude a serene and in-depth reassessment of developments outside this Conference and of the outcome of deliberations and consultations held at this forum since then. This is particularly relevant with regard to one issue - that of nuclear disarmament - which has not yet been squarely addressed by the CD. Certainly, had we already started to seriously consider proposals put forward by delegations or groups of delegations, many of the difficulties we now face would be overcome. Beyond national or group positions, what is actually at stake and cannot be disregarded in the decisions we must adopt are the general expectations of the international community, as expressed first and foremost in the resolutions approved by the United Nations General Assembly.

It is Brazil's considered view that we must keep the momentum achieved last year on the fissile materials treaty but at the same time allow for substantive progress in other areas. The reasons for prompt and vigorous action on other nuclear disarmament-related issues both outside and within the framework of this Conference are apparent. Serious and worrisome events have taken place in the last few years and have been brought to the attention of this forum. As Ambassador Mark Moher of Canada and others have been lucidly warning, the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, which is anchored in the NPT, is under severe strain and even threat.

Essential pillars of that regime have indeed been shaken by developments and policies which negatively affect several areas, notably, I should stress, the process of bilateral reductions between the United States of America and the Russian Federation; the global norm on nuclear testing; the role of nuclear weapons and deterrence doctrines in the post-cold-war world; the cessation of the qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons; the nuclear strategic stability based on the ABM Treaty; and the strengthened review process of the NPT.

Decisive action to counter these ominous signs is still lacking. They obviously impact on the CD, and the CD, as the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, cannot shirk its responsibility in discussing and subsequently negotiating multilateral arrangements aimed at promoting disarmament measures in areas where international peace and security is most threatened.

On the occasion of the deposit of our instrument of accession to the NPT last year, the Minister of External Relations of Brazil, Luiz Felipe Lampreia,

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reiterated my country's strong rejection of the notion that nuclear weapons can provide security to any nation. These weapons rather breed tension and instability and constitute a serious roadblock to international peace and security. Although we recognize that some progress has been achieved in the reduction of nuclear arsenals by the United States of America and the Russian Federation, as well as through unilateral steps that have been taken by some of the other nuclear-weapon States, that progress still falls very much short of the objective of nuclear disarmament. The NPT, my Foreign Minister stressed, will not have fulfilled its goal, as set out in article VI, until all nuclear weapons are completely eliminated. This is the clear understanding of the Brazilian executive branch and of our National Congress in expressing their consent to my country's adherence to the Treaty.

Brazil takes note with interest of the strengthened review process of the NPT which was agreed at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference. We look forward to participating actively and constructively at the coming preparatory meeting for the 2000 Review Conference, which in our view should recoup the ground lost at previous meetings and resume the positive spirit and substantive role with which the strengthened review process started in 1995.

We note that the document on principles and objectives for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation details some of the steps to be undertaken by the international community and in particular by the nuclear-weapon States in fulfilment of their commitments under article VI of the NPT. The first and second objectives of that document have already been dealt with, as we concluded the CTBT and are hopefully about to start meaningful negotiations on a fissile material treaty.

It is imperative that we should not wait for the end of negotiations on a fissile material treaty, the duration of which is hardly predictable at this stage, to start considering the next steps pursuant to article VI and its corollary, that is, the third commitment in the "Principles and objectives" document, which foresees "systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating those weapons".

More than 30 years have elapsed since the conclusion of the NPT. No one disagrees that nuclear disarmament, like any other complex endeavour, can only be achieved on a step-by-step basis. That does not mean that the nature, timing, discussion and negotiation of all aspects associated with nuclear disarmament are to be determined or concluded exclusively by the nuclear-weapon States. Substantive discussions, for instance, on a fissile material treaty which resulted in the basis on which we are going to conduct our negotiations, i.e. the Shannon report and the mandate contained therein, were already taking place in this Conference when the CTBT was being negotiated.

The consideration of the third objective necessarily involves the question of the role to be played by the CD. As it did in the past, when preparing the ground for negotiations on the CTBT and the fissile material treaty, this Conference should continue to interact in a synergistic manner

(Mr. Bahadian, Brazil)

with the NPT review process and other mechanisms in the discussion and subsequent negotiation of multilateral steps in the nuclear disarmament fields.

The pursuit, in parallel, of a series of mutually reinforcing measures at the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral levels for the achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free world is the core idea behind the Joint Declaration issued on 9 June last year by the Foreign Ministers of Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden, and entitled "Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: the need for a new agenda". We are pleased that resolution 53/77 I of the United Nations General Assembly, the main elements of which derive from the 9 June Declaration, was approved by an overwhelming majority. This positive response eloquently demonstrates the international community's general perception that this initiative is incremental to other efforts, as nothing in it implies a lack of recognition of the importance of the strengthened NPT review process and of the steps taken by some of the nuclear-weapon States.

What that initiative is all about is indeed the strengthening of the NPT-based international disarmament and non-proliferation regime and the further and speedy implementation of commitments undertaken therein under article VI. It draws our attention to the timeliness of measures that have been authoritatively examined and called for in many governmental and non-governmental instances. As is known, among these are civilian and ex-military authorities of high rank and political standing in the nuclear-weapon States themselves. Congressmen in those States, as well as in States with which they have military alliances, are also increasingly aware of the dangerous implications of continued reliance on nuclear weapons. It is therefore high time for governments of nuclear-weapon States to heed the calls of international as well as national informed public opinion on this matter.

As far as the role of the CD on nuclear disarmament is concerned, resolution 53/77 I endorses a long-standing banner of the majority of States represented in this chamber, which is the establishment of an appropriate subsidiary body to deal with this issue. We have placed on record our support of the South African proposal on the establishment of an ad hoc committee because we continue to believe that ideas along those lines would, at this stage, draw us closer to the middle ground between more substantive proposals, on the one hand, of which we remain supportive while acknowledging that political will is still missing from other quarters, and the perpetuation of mere consultations such as the troika mechanism agreed last year, on the other hand. A similar stance is reflected in the working paper on nuclear disarmament submitted last year by Canada, the reissue of which at this session is most welcome as we attempt to strike a balance between various suggestions and overcome the current impasse on our programme of work. The Brazilian delegation is ready to cooperate with you, Mr. President, and with all interested delegations in order to advance approaches which, in keeping with the tradition and nature of this body, allow for the establishment of a subsidiary body with a deliberative role, but also with some perspective in its mandate of negotiations at the CD on the next multilateral steps in the nuclear disarmament field.

(Mr. Bahadian, Brazil)

Let me now briefly comment on other issues before us. With regard to the prevention of an arms race in outer space, there seems to be an increasing awareness of the need to substantively tackle this issue in this forum, in view of recent technological developments and huge investments being made in certain capabilities that may in fact pose the risk of such an arms race taking place in the near future. Preventive disarmament should be our goal, as in the Outer Space Treaty with regard to weapons of mass destruction. Many questions have been raised, including a possible distinction between weaponization and militarization of outer space, which certainly require further technical expertise and clarification. This and other relevant issues only highlight the pressing need for the re-establishment of an ad hoc committee on this subject.

On security assurances, deliberations of the Ad Hoc Committee last year, under the able chairmanship of Ambassador de Icaza of Mexico, provided us with a better understanding of where we are now on this matter. The increasing complexities of this issue at the present international juncture should not discourage us from continuing our efforts. From our perspective, the task of the Ad Hoc Committee should be oriented towards identifying ways and means pending the achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free world, of providing those States which have unequivocally and in a legally binding manner renounced the nuclear weapons option with unconditional and legally binding assurances against the use or threat of use of such weapons.

As for anti-personnel landmines, Brazil warmly welcomes the fact that the two main international instruments aimed at limiting and eventually eliminating the scourge caused by these weapons - amended Protocol II of the CCW and the Ottawa Convention - have entered or are about to enter into force in a few days. These two agreements and their follow-up mechanisms provide a comprehensive response to the problems posed by anti-personnel landmines, although the complete removal of the millions of mines scattered around the world will regrettably continue to be one of the greatest humanitarian challenges of the international community for the foreseeable future. A CD role in this issue seems increasingly doubtful, not least from a practical point of view, as we come closer to the 2001 Review Conference of the CCW, where the issue of a possible strengthening of amended Protocol II provisions on transfers, for instance, could be discussed. Considerations such as these regarding duplication or dispersal of efforts should be taken up by a Special Coordinator on the subject.

We note that the grave problems associated with small arms and light weapons are being discussed elsewhere through intensive and praiseworthy efforts of which Brazil is supportive and that a comprehensive consideration of this issue will be the subject of an international conference to take place no later than 2001. Some exploratory work could yet be done at the CD on ideas such as an international code of conduct on arms transfers, or a global prohibition of illicit transfers which could draw upon the regional experience of the members of OAS in drafting the 1997 Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunitions, Explosives, and Other Related Materials. Incidentally, I should like to recall that cooperation in the promotion of the objectives of the

(Mr. Bahadian, Brazil)

Inter-American Convention is being pursued also at the subregional level, as agreed at the 1998 Santiago Summit of the Americas by the countries members of MERCOSUL (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) and the associate States of Bolivia and Chile. As regards transparency in armaments, Brazil is a long-standing participant in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, and believes that the review of the operation and the further development of this confidence-building mechanism should be continued by the Group of Governmental Experts next year. This does not exclude the possibility of other ways and means of promoting transparency in armaments being explored by a Special Coordinator in the CD.

Finally, on issues related to the CD itself, the useful work done last year by the Special Coordinators on the agenda, expansion and improved and effective functioning should be continued. Brazil is of the view that, irrespective of the need to pursue further consultations on those issues, an early decision should be taken by this Conference on the admission of Ecuador, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia, who will certainly make an important contribution to the work of this body.

To conclude, and departing from the substance of the issues at hand, I would invite colleagues to take a broader perspective of the importance of the decisions we take or fail to take in this chamber. As we all know, in a few weeks, we will be celebrating the centenary of the first International Peace Conference held in The Hague. Apart from its immediate achievements, one of the long-term implications of that historic conference is particularly noteworthy, that of promoting the multilateral framework as the venue in which issues that concern all humankind should be dealt with and resolved. We had to witness the horrors of two world wars in our century in order to revive The Hague spirit and live up to humanity's noblest aspirations with the creation of the League of Nations and the United Nations. As the latter was being created, weapons that are in sheer contradiction with the highest values of human civilization were being invented and were twice used. They provided a false sense of security, a symbol on the altar of which all, including those they purportedly protected, could be sacrificed. Now as this century comes to a close, general expectations that nuclear weapons would have a diminishing role after the end of the cold war remain unfulfilled and are rather being contradicted by the ominous developments and policies to which I referred above. In this context, the achievement of the objectives of this Conference will remain an elusive goal, unless it is allowed to take up its rightful responsibilities in dealing with the most important disarmament issue of all times and give a more decisive contribution to the attainment, in the not so distant future, of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Brazil for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea, Ambassador Chang.

Mr. CHANG (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, first I wish to extend my warmest congratulations to you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament at this critical juncture of our discussion. I am

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confident that your prominent leadership and experience will guide us to a fruitful and substantive debate on our agenda items. I can assure you of my delegation's fullest cooperation. Let me also express my deepest appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Grey, for his untiring efforts to get our work started as early as possible. I also wish to take this opportunity to extend my deep gratitude to Mr. Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the CD, and his deputy, Mr. Bensmail, for their valuable contribution in facilitating the work of the Conference.

The Conference on Disarmament has played an important role as the single multilateral negotiating body by producing major international treaties, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1992 and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty in 1997, thus strengthening further the disarmament and non-proliferation regime against weapons of mass destruction. Now we are facing another important task which will lead us one step further towards our common goal of international peace and security through non-proliferation and disarmament, that is, the negotiation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Four weeks of our precious time have elapsed, however, without reaching agreement on our substantive work programme since we started our 1999 session. My delegation strongly believes that it is incumbent upon us to adopt our work programme as soon as possible. We support the suggestion made by the previous President to start our work where we left off in 1998, which appears in document CD/1566. Great amounts of work and energy were already invested in adopting last year's work programme. What we need now is substantive work that will produce tangible results. I would like to urge all members of the CD to demonstrate flexibility so that we can promptly commence our substantive work.

As the Conference proceeds, many delegations have voiced their concern over the stalled progress in nuclear disarmament, and have urged the nuclear-weapon States to renew and abide by their commitment to reduce their nuclear arsenals, as they are obligated to do by article VI of the NPT. The Republic of Korea fully subscribes to this view. Given the lack of consensus among member States and the complex nature of nuclear disarmament, my delegation believes that it would be difficult for the CD to engage in multilateral negotiations for nuclear disarmament in the near future. We share, however, the sentiment of frustration expressed by some members of this Conference. It is certainly imperative that the nuclear-weapon States reinvigorate their efforts for nuclear disarmament in a very diligent manner. In this context, it is very important that START II be ratified without further delay, so that the START process will be accelerated. Such groundwork on the part of the nuclear-weapon States could ultimately lead to a situation where a multilateral framework for nuclear disarmament can be effectively pursued as a complementary but reinforcing measure.

As we have expressed on many occasions, the Republic of Korea places the highest priority on negotiations for an FMCT because this is the area where we can make concrete contributions to nuclear non-proliferation and ultimately towards nuclear disarmament. The relevance of the CD will be measured not by

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its unending debate on issues where - important as they are - we cannot reach general agreement, but by its contributions to international security by producing concrete results.

Last year, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 53/77 I, in which it welcomed the decision by the CD to establish an ad hoc committee which shall negotiate, on the basis of the report of the Special Coordinator and the mandate therein, a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, and further encouraged the Conference to re-establish its Ad Hoc Committee at the beginning of its 1999 session. We should not spare any effort to realize such aspirations of the international community which are so clearly manifest in this resolution. My delegation believes that it is high time for the CD to mobilize this momentum and move into the next stage of substantive negotiations as promptly as possible.

In conducting our negotiations on this issue, my delegation feels that in order for us to secure the universality and effectiveness of the treaty, it is very important that all the countries with nuclear capabilities, including non-member States to the NPT, fully take part in the negotiations from the initial stage. My delegation is also of the view that it would be greatly helpful if all nuclear-weapon States and threshold countries could declare, as an interim measure, a moratorium on the further production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons purposes, if they have not done so already.

While we believe that the CD should concentrate its limited resources for negotiations on concrete measures, we do not have any problem in supporting the CD as it exerts further effort to substantiate its discussion on such important issues as anti-personnel landmines (APLs), the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS), negative security assurances (NSA) and transparency in armaments (TIA), including CD reform issues to accelerate the disarmament process.

Since our position on these issues has been well expressed before, I will only briefly touch upon some of them at this point.

First of all, regarding the issue of negative security assurances (NSA), it is the position of my Government that assurances by the nuclear-weapon States not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States should apply only to NPT member States which faithfully adhere to all the obligations under the Treaty. It also believes that NSA should not be provided to those countries that use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction.

On the issue of anti-personnel landmines, we fully share the humanitarian concern of the international community over the scourge of anti-personnel landmines, and recognize, from the humanitarian perspective, the need for a universal ban on all APLs. While we could not accede to the Ottawa Convention because of our security concerns at this stage, we support reappointing the Special Coordinator to discuss the issue of banning all APL transfers.

(Mr. Chang, Republic of Korea)

Finally, my delegation wishes to reaffirm its support for the admission of five new member States to the CD - Ecuador, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia. We believe that the appropriate expansion of the CD is essential for strengthening its legitimacy as the unique global forum for disarmament. Last year we almost came to a consensus on this issue, and we believe that we should be able to take a positive decision on this matter.

In concluding I would like to draw particular attention to the pressing need for the world community to redouble its efforts to secure the universality and the full implementation of the existing non-proliferation and disarmament treaties, particularly those against weapons of mass destruction such as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and the NPT. In this respect, we attach great importance to the ongoing efforts by the BWC's Ad Hoc Group to draft a verification protocol. We also believe that every effort should be made to bring into force the CTBT at the earliest possible date. My delegation hopes that the positive reactions last year by India and Pakistan toward the signing of the CTBT will soon be translated into concrete actions. Likewise, we would like to call upon all other countries, and particularly those in the list of 44 countries set forth in the CTBT, to sign and ratify the Treaty, if they have not done so. For our part, domestic procedures are under way to ratify the CTBT, which we hopefully expect to complete in the first half of this year.

Mr. President, it is our firm belief that the CD should remain a viable and effective forum for negotiating disarmament measures. It is now time to build upon past achievements and launch concrete negotiations. Calling upon the members of the Conference to demonstrate political will and flexibility in adopting our work programme, I am very confident that, with your able guidance, the CD will be able to commence its crucial work immediately.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Ukraine, Ambassador Maimeskul.

Mr. MAIMESKUL (Ukraine): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you warmly on the assumption of the responsible and honourable duties of CD President while also expressing our hope that you will succeed in facilitating the start of substantive work in the Conference this year. In accomplishing your task, you may rely upon consistent support from my delegation. I also should like to express words of gratitude to your predecessor, Ambassador Grey of the United States of America, who has really undertaken considerable efforts to achieve the goal mentioned above. The appreciation of this delegation goes to CD Secretary-General Mr. Petrovsky, to his deputy, Mr. Bensmail, and to the secretariat staff, whose potential and capabilities have not been fully utilized by the Conference, taking into account our pace during the last two years. We also wish to extend a warm welcome to our colleagues who have recently joined the Conference and to address words of gratitude to Ambassador Bourgois and Ambassador Campbell, who are leaving the Conference on Disarmament.

(Mr. Maimeskul, Ukraine)

Mr. President, you have inherited from your predecessor the adopted CD agenda and draft decision on the programme of work, which represent the set of draft decisions establishing subsidiary bodies and consultative mechanisms to deal with the different agenda items. In drafting his proposal, the President has taken into consideration the results obtained by the Conference last year. Like many other delegations, my delegation advised the President to merge decisions CD/1501 and CD/1547 and elaborate a single draft, thus ensuring the ground to start substantive work this year. One element of this draft decision deserves special attention - I mean item 3, related to the "Presidential troika" mechanism to deal with "Cessation of the arms race and nuclear disarmament". This mechanism is a proof of the creativity displayed by the CD last year and was quite relevant when neither an ad hoc committee to negotiate the FMCT nor a subsidiary body to deliberate the general aspects of nuclear disarmament had been established. Thus the "Presidential troika" was then a fair starting point for those who declared different priorities within agenda item 1. Since 11 August 1998, when the Conference adopted a decision to start negotiations on the FMCT, there has been enough time to think about what realistic mechanism to deal with the general aspects of nuclear disarmament could be established by this multilateral forum. From this perspective, the joint proposal on nuclear disarmament submitted by Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway seems to us very timely and adequately reflects the need for and the capacity of the CD to deal with nuclear disarmament issues. It fits well into item 3 of the Presidential draft of the programme of work rather than the "Presidential troika" mechanism, which we feel is now not enough for the Conference as a whole, although we recognize its undeniable positive features and still unexhausted potential to deal with issues relevant to agenda item 1 other than the FMCT.

Now I would like to dwell briefly on the draft programme of work contained in document CD/1570, submitted by the Group of 21. In comparison with the Presidential draft, it provides for the establishment of two more ad hoc committees, respectively on nuclear disarmament under agenda item 1 and on PAROS under agenda item 3. For obvious reasons, the idea of having an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament within the CD is highly attractive to Ukraine. But we are not at all convinced that at the present stage, negotiations within such a committee could accelerate the nuclear arms reduction process. This committee should rather be entrusted to deliberate on what further measures in nuclear disarmament after the FMCT could be negotiated multilaterally, as was reflected in the renewed Canadian proposal (CD/1568) concerning CD action on nuclear disarmament.

As the Group of 21 has not included the mandate for an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament in document CD/1570, but is preparing to do so, we dare to recommend to our colleagues from the G-21 to opt for a more realistic mandate as contained, for example, in the South African or the Canadian proposal.

To have a programme of work is, without any doubt, in the interests of all CD members. I have already tried to indicate what modifications to the Presidential and G-21 draft decisions on the programme of work might increase in our view their potential to build CD consensus on this crucial issue and

(Mr. Maimeskul, Ukraine)

lead us as a result to one agreed draft decision on the programme of work, but at the same time I realize how serious the difficulties we have to face are, while continuing to follow this "package" approach. What kind of alternatives do we have to the adoption of the comprehensive programme of work? The Conference may adopt the "limited" programme of work based on the common elements of the two existing drafts, as was proposed by Germany, and we could support this approach.

At the same time, my delegation, for its part, would like to propose exploring one more option: to re-establish only the Ad Hoc Committee under agenda item 1 to negotiate the FMCT, while at the same time indicating in the relevant Presidential statement that this decision is taken without prejudice to the adoption of the programme of work and that the presidency will continue intensive consultations on the establishment of subsidiary bodies or consultative mechanisms under the other agenda items. From our perspective, this idea is rather viable. It is based on the latest CD decision adopted last year, and takes into account the adoption by consensus of United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/77 I, calling on the CD to re-establish an ad hoc committee to negotiate a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

As the CD has not yet established its programme of work, we will go into detail on its key elements at a later stage.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the Ambassador of Ukraine for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Cuba, Ambassador Amat Fores, who will be speaking on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. AMAT FORES (Cuba) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, allow me first of all to congratulate you on taking the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament. It is gratifying for me to see on the Presidential podium the representative of a friendly Latin American country such as Venezuela. We have every confidence in your experience and your diplomatic skills as you preside over this forum, and in this respect you may of course count on the full support and cooperation of the Cuban delegation. We also extend our appreciation to your predecessor and express sincere thanks for the work and the contribution made to our Conference by Mr. Petrovsky, the Secretary-General, and Mr. Bensmail, the Deputy Secretary-General, who always facilitates our work so kindly together with the rest of his team. On this occasion we echo the words of farewell expressed by other speakers to Ambassadors Campbell and Bourgois, who are leaving the Conference.

I asked for the floor this morning on behalf of the Group of 21 to present officially to the members of the Conference a draft decision and mandate for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. The draft would read - and I will now read it in English:

(continued in English)

(Mr. Amat Fores, Cuba)

"The Conference on Disarmament decides to establish an ad hoc committee under agenda item 1, 'Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament', to start negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons with a specified framework of time, including a nuclear weapon convention."

(continued in Spanish)

Mr. President, I would request you to ensure that the secretariat takes the appropriate steps so that the draft decision which I have just presented on behalf of the Group of 21 is distributed as an official document of the Conference.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the Ambassador of Cuba for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. He may be sure the secretariat will take note for the distribution of the document. I should now like to call on the distinguished representative of Chile, Ambassador Illanes.

Mr. ILLANES (Chile) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, first of all, as has been done by the delegates who have taken the floor this morning, I am very pleased to congratulate you on taking office as President of the Conference on Disarmament, and to offer you our full cooperation to help you bring your endeavours to a successful conclusion. At the same time, I would like to convey our appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Grey of the United States, for his valuable contribution to the work of the Conference on Disarmament at the beginning of the 1999 session. Similarly, our gratitude to Messrs. Petrovsky, Bensmail and their colleagues for their valuable support for the work of this Conference. We extend a warm welcome to the new colleagues, the Ambassadors of Argentina, Colombia, Indonesia, Israel, Slovakia and Sweden, and express to Ambassadors Campbell and Bourgois our regret at seeing them leave and our appreciation for the very valuable work they have done at the service of the ideals of disarmament.

This is a brief statement that we must make in connection with what has just been said by our distinguished colleague the Ambassador of Cuba in his capacity as Coordinator of the Group of 21. Regarding this proposed decision and mandate on the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament that he has just read, my delegation would like to point out that Chile considers that the Conference on Disarmament, bearing in mind the high priority given to this item, should indeed establish a mechanism to study and identify issues which could be the subject of multilateral negotiations. Chile did not oppose the consensus reached in the Group of 21, which was reported on by the Ambassador of Cuba in his statement. However, as we have previously said in the regional group, we would like to state on this occasion that a mandate with the characteristics of the one just presented by the Group, in particular that part which refers to - I quote in English - "with a specified framework of time", contains elements that, in Chile's opinion,

(Mr. Illanes, Chile)

should not be determined a priori, but should rather constitute the natural outcome of the negotiations to be undertaken on the issue as a whole. In short, Chile believes that we should avoid setting artificial deadlines in this matter.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the Ambassador of Chile for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I would now like to inform you that in the Presidential consultations we held yesterday, the possibility was raised of holding informal open-ended consultations to consider the item on the programme of work in view of the fact that we have a few proposals and new elements. I suggest that this informal meeting should be held next Tuesday, 23 February, at 10 a.m. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday, 25 February 1999 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 12 noon.